

August 1995

FOREIGN POLICY

The Exile Flotilla--Balancing Security, Political Concerns

[REDACTED]

Cuban Border Guard boats made physical contact with the flotilla's flagship, a cabin cruiser with *Democracia* painted in large letters on its side.

A Cuban Government statement acknowledged that contact occurred, but said it was "side to side" and intended solely to prevent the advance of the flotilla. The guns on the Cuban ships remained covered throughout the incident.

[REDACTED]

Several planes operating with the flotilla flew into Cuban airspace. One, operated by Brothers to the Rescue, a Florida-based organization established to assist seaborne migrants, passed over the coast of Havana and dropped leaflets bearing the name of the group. The Cubans produced a picture of the aircraft at the entrance to the Bay of Havana.

[REDACTED]

The Cuban reaction mixed restraint with an apparent desire to avoid an impression of weakness. Coverage of the event in the government media emphasized that the flotilla ignored verbal warnings, that no firearms were used, and that--in the words of Cuban television--"at no time were the provocateurs rammed, bow first, by our vessels." Fidel Castro told journalists that Cubans were "champions of patience," but that patience was running out. A government communique warned that "any boat from abroad that invades our sovereign waters can be sunk and any airplane downed." Havana, naturally, did not vow to do so, and cast its warning not as something new, but as a reaffirmation of existing policy.

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A Cuban journalist called the flotilla "a publicity stunt" by a "small, decrepit, mafia-like minority." According to a Foreign Ministry spokesman, the event was designed to upset US-Cuban relations. Discussing reports of plans for a new flotilla, the spokesman said on 20 July that equating

restraint with weakness could prove to be "a fatal mistake." Although the Cubans [REDACTED]

did not blame the US Government for the actions of the exiles. [REDACTED]

On land, the government took steps to discourage any high-profile commemoration of the sinking of the tugboat. [REDACTED] reports that nearly 30 human rights activists were detained just prior to 13 July. On the day itself, [REDACTED] police stationed at 100-meter intervals along the capital's seawall, with trucks of officers stationed nearby. A street festival with rock music was organized just blocks away. In a variation of these successful tactics, the Union of Communist Youth has scheduled a march protesting the US embargo on 5 August, the first anniversary of the disturbance that occurred near the seawall and the port of Havana. [REDACTED]

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